■ PART V

COPS Police Training Program

COMMISSION
ON
PEACE OFFICER STANDARDS AND TRAINING

COPS Problem-based Learning(PBL)/ Police Training Officer (PTO) Program

Introduction

The Police Training Officer (PTO) program is a new model for post-academy field training in law enforcement. In this model, recruits use problem-based learning (PBL) to address neighborhood problems in partnership with the communities they serve. Problem-based learning is a recent development in police education and this program is the first time it has been used in such a fashion. Two of the developers of the PBL/PTO program, Greg Saville (MES. MCIP) and Gerard Cleveland (MA, B.Ed.), provided the following program summary specifically for inclusion in the California *POST Field Training Program Guide*.

Origination of Problem-Based Learning (PBL)

Problem-based learning (PBL) has been used widely to teach medical students training to become doctors. On the Web today you will find dozens of university, high school, and elementary school sites that indicate these facilities are using PBL. Problem-based learning began in the late 1970s and early 1980s when Dr. H. S. Barrows from McMaster University Medical School in Ontario (Canada) found that medical students were entering examining rooms with vast amounts of knowledge but unable to ask the right questions of the patients they were examining. Their learning had taken place in classrooms and within the covers of medical texts, but when faced with actual patients, the interns were often unable to apply their knowledge successfully to cure the patients' ailments.

Medical students were not training simply to learn about diseases or anatomy or pharmacology. They were learning to improve the quality of peoples' lives by incorporating many strategies. While the students needed an essential body of knowledge, they also needed to know how and when to apply that information effectively when treating patients. Further, the students required a system of learning and retaining information that they could continue to use throughout their careers as doctors. PBL was so successful that numerous medical schools have now adopted it for use.

The similarities to policing are striking. Trainees need to learn much more than just the laws and procedures of our jurisdictions. They must understand how to use their knowledge judiciously and effectively when dealing with individuals within that community. They must also have a learning guideline that they can use each time they encounter different community problems.

Because we are asking more from our police today, it follows that we must provide them with the resources and the training to fulfill their expanding roles. The title *law enforcer* is too narrow a mandate or description for any officer working in the United States today. Herman Goldstein pioneered the concept of Problem-Oriented Policing and wrote that the police objectives in our society span a wide range of activities from the protection of threats to life and property and assisting crime victims to the creation and maintenance of a community security. It makes good sense to have police trainees thinking about roles and responsibilities as they approach specific problems in their daily work.

PBL/PTO Program Summary

Many police agencies in California have adopted a philosophy widely known as community oriented policing and problem solving (COPPS). As a philosophy, COPPS operates at the very basic foundation of our culture: our values. To embrace value-driven policing, departments must determine the local community values and use them as the basis for creating their COPPS philosophy. Typically this begins at the level of the patrol officer, and it is during field training where these values are first taught.

New officers across the state enter their organizations with various views of policing. During the first several months these officers develop a manner of behaving that allows them to operate safely, ethically, and competently in their new environment. If field training does not inculcate them into the principles of COPPS and value-driven policing, police progress will be impossible to sustain into the future. That is why the new Police Training Officer (PTO) program has been developed.

Recent education research has significantly improved our understanding of how adults learn. We now know a great deal about how the brain works and how individuals function when involved in learning new information or developing new skills. The problem-based learning methodology so successfully used by Dr. Barrows with medical school students in the 1970s and 80s has been adapted and designed specifically for police training. That problem-based learning philosophy has been incorporated as the central component of the PTO program.

We also know that learning styles are based upon "multiple intelligences," an idea developed by Harvard University's Howard Gardiner. Further, we know that when acquiring knowledge or skills, adults must be able to transfer what they learn to *real-life* situations. Daniel Goleman and others argue that learners, especially those who want to work effectively with others, must acquire a level of relationship knowledge, or "Emotional Intelligence," to claim any sort of success as problem solvers or leaders.

Problem-based learning capitalizes on contemporary research and is an integral component of the PTO program. In this program, recruits learn COPPS and value-driven policing from the very start of the program. From their first day of training, the recruits begin solving problems in partnership with others within and external to the department. This collaboration resides at the center of the PBL training activities. The regular duties of policing are incorporated, but they are put into the context of specific neighborhood problems that these new officers will face throughout their careers. Recruits are challenged to think creatively and to effectively use community resources to deal with disorder and crime. They are allowed to learn through both their positive and negative experiences, without failing the program, and they quickly gain the confidence required to employ collaborative, ethical, and creative approaches to policing.

Moving Forward

Now is the time for police training to move forward into the 21st Century. For over 25 years, law enforcement officers in California, indeed across America, have used different versions of the same field training officer program (FTO) to coach recruits who graduate from the academy. Known by different names, the traditional model uses training checklists that list topics such as animal services, arrest powers, evidence, family disputes, juvenile procedures, and so forth. Individually, each of these items is an important part of the job. But in the traditional FTO program, testing emphasizes the performance of individual tasks, rather than the ability to deal holistically with a variety of police activities, skills, and knowledge. In the real world of policing, seldom do events occur as independent actions. Rather, they take place as complicated affairs in which officers must use discretion in interpreting events, make intelligent decisions, and actually resolve problems. A checklist does little to teach the trainee how to resolve complex problems. The PTO program addresses the disconnect that currently exists between *task training* and holistic, problem-solving policing.

Incorporating problem-based learning into the new PTO program commenced with research by consultants working with the Reno Police Department

and the Police Executive Research Forum under funding from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. The project was launched in 2000 through the work of Reno Police Chief Jerry Hoover and Deputy Chief Ronald Glensor. Police consultants Gerry Cleveland and Gregory Saville from the University of New Haven wrote the PTO manual incorporating problem-based learning and taught 200 police training officers in the six initial pilot agencies: Reno, NV; Savannah, GA; Lowell, MA; Charlotte-Mecklenberg, NC; Colorado Springs, CO; and, Richmond, CA. From that point, the original authors, officers in Reno, researchers from the Police Executive Research Forum, and officers from the other pilot agencies made many contributions to *fine tune* the final product.

During this research, hundreds of training officers from across the country responded to surveys. They indicated that early in the traditional FTO program trainees begin to believe that they can survive by doing the minimum amount or "just enough" rather than taking a risk in the performance of a task, failing and receiving a low grade on the daily observation reports. The trainees get *marks* on the FTO checklists for successfully stopping speeding cars, but there is no corresponding check mark to indicate whether or not *ongoing* traffic problems in the area were actually solved. Similarly, the trainee may receive a check mark for dealing with pedestrian *contacts,* but less evaluative emphasis is placed on whether or not this contact had any significant impact on neighborhood crime. The current evaluation system does little to establish a climate for the kind of learning that improves problem-solving. In short, current FTO training and evaluation procedures are inculcating our young officers to mirror the practices of incident-driven policing.

The traditional FTO model focuses upon legal issues, in particular liability and termination. Vicarious liability is something that all police administrators must consider. The FTO format was designed to enable agency heads to stand up in court and defend themselves against claims of inadequate or insufficient training. In research for the new PTO program it became apparent that, in fact, very few departments have been able to effectively use the model for that purpose. Courts, as well as the public, are generally more interested in knowing that trainees learn proper policing methods so that mistakes do not happen in the first place. The type of training model an agency chooses and the method by which they apply the training, and adhere to those training guidelines, has a greater significance than simply checking off tasks on a performance list.

A focus on liability issues has led, in common practice, to a focus on time and effort spent documenting the reasons for termination, rather than on training. Certainly, agencies require documentation to plan and complete remedial training efforts. But in the traditional FTO program much of the documentation tends to be a paper trail for justifying the termination of the trainee. Once

the training officer has decided that the evaluations are for termination, training tends to stop and building a case against the trainee starts. In the new PTO program, the authors have addressed this problem by separating the role of the trainer and evaluator in an effort to enhance the training and ensure that those individuals selected for employment have every possible chance to successfully complete the police officer training program.

Conclusion

The writers of this summary, Greg Saville (MES. MCIP) and Gerard Cleveland (B. Ed., MA), and indeed all of the agencies and organizations mentioned in it have graciously included California POST staff in many of their training sessions and conferences. California POST supports the efforts made by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), and the Reno Police Department in the research and development of this project. POST regulations have been revised to allow selected agencies to begin pilot testing this program. Implementation kits will be available through POST's Basic Training Bureau. A more extensive program description can be found in Appendix XIV. ■